

## **PREPARING FOR THE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES**

An effective way to prepare the mind and body before beginning is through progressive relaxation. Close your eyes and allow your body to relax from the crown of your head to the bottom of your feet, consciously releasing any tensions you notice. You are then ready to begin a series of specific exercises to achieve relaxation of the areas that can inhibit healthy phonation.

## **SIX EXERCISES IN RELAXATION**

These exercises are to be used not just before you begin to speak or sing, but also during vocal exercises, on every vowel, and finally on all pitches throughout your range. If you can achieve this at the beginning of your study, you will have conquered a major part of your technical trouble at its source. These exercises are progressive, one through six; ideally, each earlier exercise should be maintained as you proceed through the sequence.

In performing the following exercises, remember to be gentle and deliberate, without forcing. Some areas of tension may release on through repetition over time.

1) ***The muscles of the face.*** With pads of fingers, slowly and gently massage the facial muscles starting at your hairline and forehead, and continuing downward to your cheeks, lips, and chin. Use circular motions with both hands and feel your skin and underlying muscle yielding to the gentle movement of your fingers. Spend time on areas that feel tight, such as eyebrows and temples. As you massage your cheeks, let your jaw hang slack with your lips and teeth slightly apart.

***Facial muscles that do not hold tension will allow and enhance the singer's ability to project a full range of expression and emotion.*** Maintaining the relaxation of these facial muscles, proceed to the next area.

2) ***The tongue.*** Let your tongue soften and allow it to come forward to rest slightly out of your mouth on your lower lip, as it might if you were unconscious. It is important for your tongue to gently fall forward by releasing muscular holding, rather than by pushing it forward with muscular effort. Now stretch your tongue further out of your mouth down toward your chin, stretching it at the back. You may feel a pull under your chin. Then let it release back to lie relaxed against or on the lower lip. Repeat several times until you feel less pull.

The tongue muscle structure is most often at fault in interfering with the free emission of the voice.

The tongue is a very large mass of muscles, covering the entire floor of the

mouth and extending down to the hyoid bone, from which the larynx is suspended. The front part of the tongue, which we can actually see in our mouth, is a very small portion compared to the much larger part that extends down the throat. If it is tensed in any way, the singer or speaker will be in trouble. *Evidence of frontal-tongue tension indicates tension at the root of the tongue, thereby creating tension in all the surrounding musculature that we are trying to release.*

***Relaxation requires developing an awareness of that tension, then learning to let go. Freedom of the tongue will allow clear diction and easy articulation. The tongue must move for articulation, but it can move with ease.***

Maintaining the relaxed facial and tongue muscles, move on to the next area.

**3) *The Swallowing Muscles.*** The swallowing muscles can be felt under the chin and are the main muscles responsible for elevating the larynx. They are strong muscles, and when they contract during phonation they can cause all kinds of vocal problems. It is vitally important that this area be kept relaxed, soft, and pliable during all phases of voice production.

Keeping your tongue relaxed in your mouth, you can massage these swallowing muscles to help them soften and release.

***Freedom of the swallowing muscles allows the larynx to stay in its naturally low position and facilitates easy onset of sound.***

Maintaining relaxation in the facial, tongue, and swallowing muscles, move on to the next area.

**4) *The Mandible (Jaw):*** The “jaw hinge,” which is in front of the ears, is called the Temporomandibular Joint or (TMJ). There must be ease of movement in this joint, and the jaw must be able to drop without resistance. Look at the warm-ups in the Tongue/Jaw Coordination section of the warm-ups.

***The benefits of a released jaw are consistency of resonating space, easy articulation, and freedom in the vocal tract.***

**5) *The Larynx:*** Find your larynx by gently placing your fingers flat against the front of your neck. Now swallow; your fingers should feel the larynx rise and fall. With the larynx in its naturally low position, place the thumb and forefinger of one hand on either side of the larynx, and lightly move it from side to side. Eventually it will move easily. This exercise should be approached gently at all times.

The muscles that attach to the larynx (and/or the hyoid bone above it) are known as strap muscles and are responsible for keeping the larynx suspended in the throat.

***Freedom in the strap muscles allows the larynx to perform its full range of actions for speaking and singing.***

Maintaining relaxation in the facial, tongue, swallowing, and jaw muscles, and the laryngeal area, move on the next area.

6) ***The Neck and Head:*** Allow your head to fall forward with the chin toward your chest. There is no need to pull your head down, simply release it and let it fall with the pull of gravity. This weight will help stretch the back of your neck, allowing those muscles to slowly lengthen and your head to fall even further forward. Now bring your head back to its balanced position atop the spine. Allow it to nod up and down lazily on the balance point while maintaining all the other relaxation areas.

***Release of tension in the muscles of the neck enables a release in other muscular systems in the body, allowing the appropriate muscles to work in concert for phonation.***

Practice these exercises while seated at first. Then take the standing posture you have learned and repeat them. Once you have become familiar with this routine, it is time to apply what you have learned to vocalizing.